

YASUKUNI BILL BOILS UP

LEADERS ON MANY FRONTS have suddenly awakened to the dangers in the bill to nationalize the Yasukuni Shrine to the War Dead, to which Japanese Christians have been calling attention to for so long.

The issue came to national attention when on April 13 the Liberal-Democratic Party forced the bill into the Lower House plenary without deliberation. Opposition parties immediately responded by boycotting all debate in the Diet. The stalemate was resolved temporarily by a tabling action but the fate of the bill remains uncertain, enmeshed in political dealings.

An insert in this issue reports reactions to the bill from various sources, revealing various aspects of the problem.

KOREA SITUATION EVOKES WORLD CONCERN

Korean Christians made three requests of Japanese Christians when Moderator Isuke Toda visited Korea in mid-March:

1. Call international attention to the present situation in Korea, in which freedom of speech has been removed and many pastors have been imprisoned;
2. Contribute to the support of the families of the pastors who have been imprisoned;
3. Pour greater energy into fighting discrimination against Koreans in Japan and seeking the return to the homeland of Koreans remaining in Sakhalin.

During the course of his visit to Korea, Toda contacted the three churches with which the Kyodan has cooperative agreements: The Presbyterian Church of Korea, the Korean Methodist Church and The Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea; two seminaries and The Korean Methodist Church.

Reporting on his visit in the April 13 and 20 issues of the Kyodan Shimpo Toda called attention to one series of recent events: the January 8 emergency measures of Korea President Chung Hee Park forbidding criticism of the government; the call for reinstatement of freedom of speech by eleven pastors; their subsequent arrest, conviction and imprisonment; and the arrest and imprisonment of two seminary students who sought the men's release.

Toda reported that individual Christians and Christian churches are struggling deeply with the question of how to react to the Park government's posture. He observed that responses differ according to one's interpretation of the situation and of the Christian faith. And he brought to Japanese Christians the three requests above that were put to him by Korean Christians.

READERS ARE URGED to refer to the April 19 issue of the Japan Christian Activity News for the latest news from Korea.

TWO VIEWS ON EXPLO '74

Plans have been announced for a gigantic mass evangelism effort known as EXPLO '74 to be carried out in Korea from August 13-18, with an anticipated 15,000 persons taking part from 210 ethnic groups in 63 countries. The generating force is the Christian Campus Crusade, with headquarters in the United States, in cooperation with a CCC branch in Seoul. The CCC is sponsoring EXPLOs biennially in various parts of the world.

A committee has been formed to recruit 3,000 participants from Japan. It describes the purposes of the "Korea Visit" as 1) to nurture mature Christians strong in practical evangelism; 2) to encounter the moving spirit of the Korean churches; 3) to make of the waters of reconciliation a flowing stream for world mission.

In Japan, as in Korea, attitudes vary toward the appropriateness of EXPLO '74 as a form of mission in Korea today. Below are two opinions, one from Moderator Isuke Toda, who recently visited Korea; the other from former Moderator Kikaku Shimamura:

Moderator Isuke Toda

At a time when democracy and society face a crisis and Korean Christian churches are suffering for taking responsible action in today's world, a program has come along that seems to lean in another direction and is under suspicion of being used by the government.

The National Council of Churches in Korea is not participating in it, nor are the churches that belong to it, and individual participants seem to be gradually withdrawing.

A big campaign to secure 3,000 participants from Japan has been launched with various names listed as sponsors.... As Moderator of the Kyodan, which has cooperative relationships with three Korean churches, I would like to caution Kyodan-related pastors and laymen against participating in it, although this is a matter which each person is free to decide for himself. But I would ask that persons who take part do so only after considering very carefully what political intentions or results this program may have.

One reason Christianity has come to be trusted so deeply in Korea is that the Christian church has made human freedom and democracy a fundamental issue and continues to protect them, although this required great sacrifices under Japanese imperialism and appears now, for the third time, to be in danger of being lost.

Wouldn't it be irresponsible to become involved in a Korean Christian enterprise of so controversial a nature without a real understanding of what the religious-political issues really are?

Rev. Kikaku Shimamura

At the present time various voices are being raised in opposition to EXPLO '74. However, the facts on the intent and purpose of this undertaking are as follows:

First, it is not anything that has come up suddenly but something the churches of the world have been praying about for many years in terms of its ecumenical significance. And churches in Korea have been praying for it very strongly. In Korea, there are many churches that are not publicly participating but also many pastors who are participating on a personal basis.

This program is also represented as a case of the churches' being used by the present government but, as a matter of fact, this is one in a whole series of international evangelistic efforts. Thus it is not a case of kowtowing to the present government. Basically the program takes the position of having no relationship to the government issue.

Furthermore, persons protesting against the present government have been arrested, but it appears that the Korean NCC has made no public statement on this, and we feel that we should not intervene.

Once again, let me say that I would like this program to be understood as an activity in which people from various churches want to go and carry on evangelism purely from the point of their faith....In short, this activity has as its aim evangelism on the part of believers in various churches on the grounds of their ecumenical faith.

THE NATIONALIZATION OF THE YASUKUNI SHRINE has long been opposed by Christians in Japan as counter to the guarantees of separation of state and religion and freedom of faith in the Constitution and as an action with militaristic implications that threaten the peace of the nation and the world. With the forced passage of the bill through the cabinet committee of the Lower House, the general public has suddenly, and for the first time, become aware of and vocal with regard to the bill. Below are excerpts from some of the many statements, editorials and articles that have appeared this month.

JAPAN COUNCIL OF RELIGIONS:

The bill placing the Yasukuni Shrine under state control is in itself an infringement of the freedom of religion, glorifies war and encourages the revival of militarism.

(4/14 Statement)

111 LAW SCHOLARS:

....Supporting the Japanese Constitutional system as being the most reliable means of contributing to the peace of the world and the welfare of mankind, we point to dangers inherent in the Yasukuni Shrine Bill as a challenge to the system that may not be readily apparent and declare our staunch opposition to it.

4/5/74 Statement)

KYOTO HOUSEWIFE, 56-years old

....It is said that maintenance by the state of Yasukuni Shrine is the desire of the war bereaved families but we as bereaved have absolutely no desire for anything of this kind.

The heart of the bereaved desires that we shall not a second time cause people to be killed in war nor create a second time the conditions under which families are bereaved due to war.

While happy over Mr. Onoda's safe return, I, who personally experienced the loss of a dear family, friends, a husband and a beloved friend, am pained that this may serve to emphasize the militaristic spirit....

The spirit of the bereaved desires that never will men have to live under the fear of prewar that they will be taken for traitors if they do not die the soldier's death under orders from the Emperor....

Our memorial to the war dead is to act in such a way as not to produce another generation who come to be glorified as "war gods."

(4/16/64 Letter to the Editor,
Asahi Shimbun)

YOSHIAKI IIZAKA:

....Basically the first business of government should be the stability of the lives of the citizens. But this government, to which we can no longer entrust the welfare of the citizens, has in order to cover up its failures started trying frantically to give "moral leadership" to citizens, even though the people's spiritual lives are an area in which a government should never interfere. It is in precisely this kind of situation that fascism begins to assert itself. Rather than openly building up armaments, first it starts building up a base of militarist nationalism by leading, expounding and forcing a spiritual movement. (Asahi Journal 4/26/74)

MAINICHI DAILY NEWS Editorial 4/16/74

....Nobody doubts the desirability of paying respect to those who died fighting for their country; it is a spontaneous feeling. However, the so-called Yasukuni Shrine Law cannot be considered an appropriate expression of that sentiment.

SOCHO JUNSHO OHTA, NISHI HONGAN TEMPLE

The forcing through of the Yasukuni Bill without the counsel of the Representatives is highly regrettable. Forcing people to bypass their own religions and worship at Yasukuni Shrine is an invasion of freedom of belief.

(Statement following similar telegram sent to government leaders 4/13/74)

"Tensei Jingo" ASAHI SHIMBUN 4/14/74

....The unhappy alliance of government and religion, whether East of the Pacific or West, is a history filled time and again with bloodshed....

First, will the splitting of public opinion and the forcing through of the

TENSEI JINGO (continued)

bill in an attempt to buy votes console the spirits of the dead?

There is also the interpretation that the high-handed procedures of the cabinet committee--with no expectation that the legislative action can be completed by the House of Councillors--was for the purpose of garnering the support of the War Bereaved Families prior to the House of Councillors' election.

Surely no one would think of making use of the spirits of the dead to gain votes--and yet what about this point?

Third, according to the bill, Yasukuni Shrine is categorized as not being a religion and is put under government supervision. Judged from a common sense point of view or from the history of Yasukuni Shrine, this must be viewed as an irrational interpretation. It recalls the dark past forced on us when national Shinto was not just one religion but was elevated to the status of the national religion.

BUDDHIST PRIEST, Akita Ken

I oppose the Yasukuni Shrine Bill:

1. Because it is contrary to the Constitution (Articles 20 and 29)
2. Because it holds the danger of a revival of State Shinto and another attempt to destroy Buddhism.
3. Because it is a desecration of the spirits of those whose lives were sacrificed in the war.
4. Because it violates freedom of faith.
5. Because it is a system devised to warp and paralyze the conscience of the citizens.
6. Because it is bound up with the revival of the militaristic state.
7. Because it is a deceitful sham to deify by the authority of the government those who were summoned to serve, beaten down by army education, made to kill the innocent of other countries, and were then killed and elevated to the position of heroic war gods in the national shrine.

(from printed postcard 4/74)

SHINOBU OIDE:

I was shocked by news of the forced action on the Yasukuni Shrine Bill. On July 26, 1942, on suspicion of oppos-

OIDE: (continued)

ing the law for the maintenance of public order, all former Holiness pastors were rounded up. My father, as an affiliated pastor, was taken to the police station....He was indicted and sentenced to four years' imprisonment. ...On Sept. 9, 1945 he died in prison.

....At that time, when State Shinto was elevated to a position above all religions people, regardless of their religion, were forced to worship at the Yasukuni Shrine, and anyone who refused was persecuted as a traitor to his country. Once it is said that Yasukuni Shrine is no longer a religion, if the government conducts rites there, it will undoubtedly do the same thing again....

"When this happens under "guaranteed freedom of faith," it appears that the time may be drawing near when those who will become forced to worship at the Shrine, those who will participate regardless of their own feelings, and those who will accept persecution for religious conscience must shed blood.

(4/19/74 Letter to the Editor,
Asahi Shimbun)

AND IN WASHINGTON, D.C.:

On March 15, persons related to the NCCUSA visited officials of the Japan Desk of the U.S. Dept. of State, following up a letter from Gen. Secy. John Nakajima, JNCC, to President Richard Nixon, requesting the President not to visit Yasukuni Shrine in the event of a visit to Tokyo because such a visit would strengthen reactionary forces seeking to revive the spirit of jingoistic ultranationalism of the past.

Said Rev. Elinor Galusha of the United Church Board for World Ministries, a participant, "I think this visit increased the awareness by the Department of State of the importance of this issue in Japan. Recent developments in the Diet have underlined the importance of the message which we took to the Department of State. This is a good illustration of how the Christian church can aid in the process of international communication and sharing of views."

In Japan editorials criticizing the bill appeared also in the Asahi Shimbun, Sankei Shimbun, and other papers. WCTU, YWCA, NCC and others issued statements.

THE WORDS, WIT AND WISDOM OF TOMIO MUTO - IN COC

by Alden Matthews

The churches in Japan are small and weak - like sheep - whereas the Christian schools are big and strong - like lions. And yet in this case the lions are afraid of the sheep.

These words, spoken by Tomio Muto, brought down the house at a consultation on cooperative mission held some years ago by the Council of Cooperation and the Interboard Committee for Christian Work in Japan. They were uttered at a time when the Christian schools felt that they had to resist being taken over by the new United Church and are typical of the colorful way Muto has sparked the imagination of the Council since, as a newly elected chancellor of Meiji Gakuin, he became a member of the COC a decade ago.

Last month Muto resigned as Meiji Gakuin Chancellor, thus losing his eligibility for COC membership as a representative of the COC-related Schools Council. His presence will be sorely missed.

As a member of the COC Policy Committee, the Executive Committee, the Missionary Personnel Committee, and in missionary orientation conferences as well, he has brought earthy realism, combined with the ability to put challenges and opportunities in visionary, mind-expanding expressions.

He has often referred to "the jungle of nature" and "the jungle of culture" in which Christian witness takes place. This is more than a struggle for survival: it is a struggle to blaze new trails toward more meaningful internationalism and a higher quality of life. Addressing the 1974 Kyodan-related Missionary Conference at Gotemba, he said:

It is good to send missionaries to an underdeveloped or developing area but even better to send them to a developed country where the number of Christians is small and they are surrounded by pagan people. Sending missionaries into the jungle of culture may be far more meaningful than sending them into the jungle of nature.

The roles of English teaching and of the Christian schools are subjects that come up often in COC discussions; on both Muto has left his distinctive mark.

He has not permitted his responsibilities as Meiji Gakuin Chancellor, publisher of Kirisuto Shimbun (Christ Weekly), Representative Director of the Christian Literature Society and a dozen other important responsibilities to keep him from teaching English to junior high schools students once a week. Thus he not only advocates the teaching of English to Japanese youth as a significant vocation but practices it himself.

On the Christian schools, Muto has often remarked that they should not expect to attract the best students. The best will attend Tokyo University and other national universities and subsequently become the nation's first rank leaders. It is the second best who will come to the private Christian schools, which have an opportunity to turn them into first best persons, equipped for Christian obligations of citizenship in the world of tomorrow.

Highly verbal, Tomio Muto also possesses another talent, greatly coveted in the Orient: the art of calligraphy. In the COC offices hangs a quotation from the Chinese classics, written in Muto's own brush script:

When Sung-tse enquired about the weight of an incense burner, Wang Sun-man replied that the real question was not the burner but virtue.

This is typical of Muto-Sensei--what he might say and what others might say about his approach to life--an approach that cuts through the superficialities to the heart of the matter.

Knowing and working with him in the COC context has meant frequent exposure to a ready wit, an eloquent tongue and a warm heart.

what has been -- I N T H E K Y O D A N -- what is to be

I. Coming Events

District moderators to meet 4/24-25 and discuss possibilities of fall General Assembly

Opposition-against-Yasukuni Nationalization Bill meeting with 30,000 expected to attend to be held 4/25 (Shimpo 4/27)

NCC encourages observation of Pentecost Sunday on local level as Ecumenical Sunday

District assemblies to be held between April 29 and May 22

II. Recent Events

Districts

Tokyo's five sub-districts complete assemblies (Shimpo 4/13)

Ecumenical

National Christian Council holds special Assembly to restructure with AVACO and some functions of former Div. of Service becoming independent; new divisions to be Mission-Service, Education, Literature (JCAN 4/19)

Education

All-church high school student conference held in Hokkaido on "Living in the Springtime of Life" (Shimpo 4/20)

Evangelism

Questions and Answers on EXPLOR '74 and the invitation for participation of Japanese (Shimpo 4/13, 4/20; KNL 4/74)

Ministry

Kyodan officers' cabinet makes public its view on ministerial examination and its answer to the Com. on Ministerial Training and Qualifications (Shimbun 4/20)

Overseas

Mod. Isuke Toda visits Korea and churches with cooperative agreements with Kyodan (Shimpo 4/13, 4/20; KNL 4/74)

NCCCUSA and JNAC personnel meet with U.S. government officials following up JNCC Gen. Secy. Nakajima's letter requesting Pres. Nixon not to visit Yasukuni Shrine if he visits Japan

Social

Lower House cabinet committee rams Yasukuni Bill through for Diet action without deliberation; opposition parties and religious groups mount immediate resistance; mass media also criticize mode of passage and content (Shimpo 4/20, Shimbun 4/20, KNL 4/74)

111 scholars of legislative, government and Constitutional law from 40 universities issue statement calling for withdrawal of Yasukuni Shrine Nationalization Bill (Shimbun 4/13)